



January 7, 2010

Dale C. Alverson, M.D., Medical Director
Center for Telehealth
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center
MSC11 6090
1005 Columbia NE
Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001

Re: FCC Docket No. 02-60, Rural Health Care Pilot Program

Dear Dr. Alverson,

I am writing to support a request to extend the Southwest Telehealth Access Grid (SWTAG) project, one of the Federal Communication Commission's Rural Health Care Pilot Programs. This serves as the Navajo Area Office/Indian Health Service' commitment to our ongoing partnership with the University of New Mexico Center for Telehealth in this important program. Navajo Area Office/IHS endorses the request for a one-year extension of the June 2010 deadline for filing the Form 466 as well as the waiver of the requirement that Pilot Program funding be limited to three Funding Years, so that funds currently committed to the SWTAG may be carried forward to June 2011.

The SWTAG project will serve the citizens of the southwestern region of the United States well and its goals and objectives are of significant value to our communities. It is intended to be an integrated interstate network of networks built upon the extensive experience of key participants in rural telemedicine and rural healthcare. Navajo Area Office/IHS' own objectives are reinforced by the SWTAG goal to extend and leverage existing and planned statewide networking infrastructure initiatives and investments to create a telehealth access grid of rural healthcare telemedicine systems, particularly with the integration of high-speed Internet backbones offered by Internet2 and National LambdaRail.

Despite the diligent efforts of the SWTAG and its staff, the desired impact from the RHCPP has not been realized as hoped. We share the concerns of many other of our peers nationally that we will be unable to meet the June 2010 deadline for submitting final project documents necessary to benefit from this federal program as intended. Given a wide range of competing budgetary and operational realities, serious concerns have arisen about successful project completion as this program entered its final year. While there is universal support for the intent of the RHCPP and its potential benefit, the current economic climate has resulted in delayed SWTAG project activities. A program extension will allow SWTAG and its members to complete the project in an efficient and thoughtful manner.

Therefore, Navajo Area Office/IHS strongly supports the request that the Southwest Telehealth Access Grid be given a one-year extension to June 30, 2011 to meet the RHCPP's requirements that are now in place for the June 30, 2010 deadline.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael J. Belgarde". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Belgarde" clearly visible.

CDR Michael J. Belgarde, NAIHS CIO

Cc: John Hubbard, Jr., NAIHS Area Director